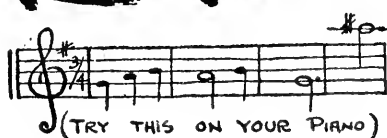


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YE ANCIENT HISTORY OF NORFOLK IN RAGTIME

O-O-OH!



== BY ==

FRANK WING

ILLUSTRATED BY
WILLIAMSON

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THE dates given in this volume
are historically correct. So
are a few of the facts.

FRANK STANWORTH WING

Copyright 1913 by Frank S. Wing

ANCIENT HISTORY

— OF —

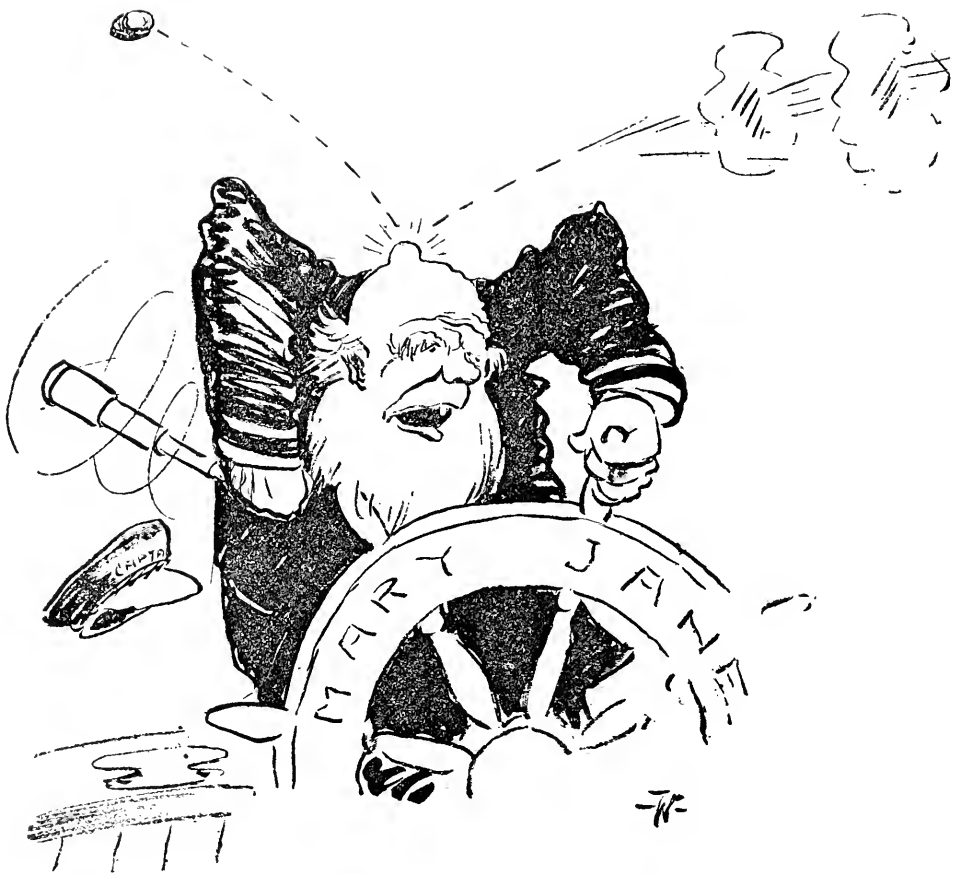
NORFOLK IN RAGTIME



OLD FRANK WING
AS SEEN BY
WILLIAMSON —



THAT FELLOW
WILLIAMSON
AS SEEN BY
ME
Frank Wing,



"Ricochetted From The Captain's Skypiece."

4,20-

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2001

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, may well be described as an island, being situated on a body of land completely surrounded by rivers, creeks, estuaries and advertising billboards. Through the interstices of the latter may occasionally be seen glimpses of Chesapeake Bay and the rolling ocean.

The city is at the southeastern end of the State, in latitude 36 degrees, 50 minutes, 50 seconds, north, and observations taken for a period of five years, beginning in 1856, showed that the average temperature is 35 hundredths of a degree cooler than that of Portsmouth, Virginia. This, perhaps, accounts for the fact that all of the summer resorts are located on the Norfolk side of the river.

Taken as a whole, the temperature is mild and equable, although General Ben Butler is said to have complained greatly of frost when he visited here shortly after the Civil War. Officially, the coldest day on record locally was January 23, 1857, when the thermometer registered five degrees below zero at 7 a. m. The Elizabeth was frozen solidly enough to permit the crossing of pedestrians and vehicles for several days, and a barroom was built in the center of the river, being the first time on record when hot Tom and Jerries were served on ice. The saloon did a rushing business, and a number of Norfolk and Portsmouth people are said to have slipped out there after a few drinks.

While on the weather topic, it may be remarked that Norfolk and Constantinople, Turkey, have the same average temperature—58.26 degrees. So has Trebizond, on the Black Sea. The thousands of Norfolk people who have visited Trebizond may have noticed this.

Just when Norfolk was settled by so-called civilized people is shrouded in mystery. There is a tombstone in St. Paul's churchyard bearing the date 1642 and the name of a woman, who very possibly may have been one of the maidens told of by Mary Johnson in "To Have And To Hold." Again, while boring for water in 1833, workmen found a strange coin thirty feet below the surface of the earth. This could not be passed at any saloon, and closer examination showed the bit of money to be of either Norwegian or Roman origin. This should excite no wonder. Many strangers have dropped their money in Norfolk.

That Norfolk has been a place of human habitation for uncounted centuries is shown by some of the municipal methods still in vogue here. Many of these antedate the Noahlian period by several geological eras. It would not require a strong imagination to visualize some prehistoric Norfolk County magistrate arraigning our antediluvian ancestor on the charge of exceeding the speed limit with his dinosaur, and fining the unfortunate man whatever he happened to have in his pockets. And the fee system is said to have been in use in Assyria 4379 years before the first baseball season opened.

History tells us that the General Assembly of Virginia, on June 8, 1680, directed the purchase of fifty acres of land for the "Towne of Norfolk." 10,000 pounds of "good merchantable tobacco and caske" being paid. This property ran the length of Main street and extended northerly to what is now City Hall ave-



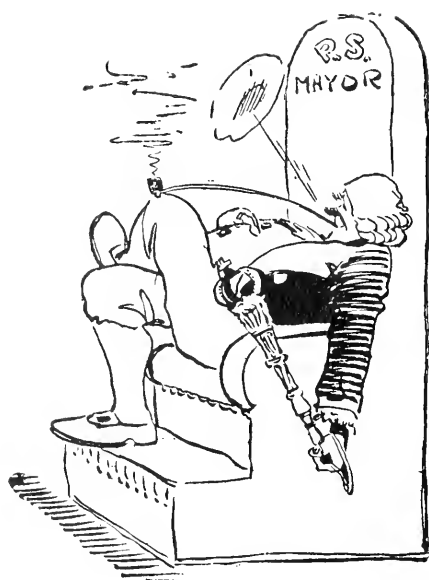
nue, then a creek. King Charles II, at that time not only defender of the faith but sovereign of England, Scotland, Ireland, France, and then some, authorized the buying of the land in question, but seems to have taken little interest in the affair, there being no record of his even coming over to have a look at his newly acquired holdings. This carelessness on his part caused much adverse comment at the time, and is typical of some monarchs. Queen Victoria, who held stock in many American railroads, never used a single one of the passes presented her.

Another Act of Assembly in 1691 incorporated Norfolk and Hampton as towns, and an often disputed question may as well be settled now. Norfolk and Hampton are the oldest incorporated cities of any importance in the State. Williamsburg, thought by many to be of great antiquity, was not incorporated until eight years later, and Richmond not until 1752. Jamestown was incorporated in 1669, but is now hardly more than the memory of a village.

Norfolk received a royal charter in 1736 and immediately proceeded to burden itself with a council, who held their first meeting on November 18, of that year, when a number of important matters were "placed on the table." They are still there.

Samuel Boush became first mayor, dying in office, and Sir John Randolph (knight) was appointed recorder, or police justice. A knight was somebody else in those long-gone days, and it is not likely that there were any appeals from Sir John's decisions. Sir John presented Norfolk with its beautiful and unique silver civil mace.

It may not be amiss at this juncture to mention the remarkable record of John E. Holt. This gentleman was regularly appointed mayor of the city in 1808 and served the full term of one year. He was again elected in 1815, serving another full year. He then began his career as a substitute mayor by serving four months of the unexpired term of William B. Lamb in 1817. From this time until 1832, when he died in office, he was what might be called a permanent substitute mayor. There were fifteen appointments of other men, but they didn't seem to want the job. After a day or so of service, each would resign, and Holt would be selected to take his place. Only two of the regularly elected mayors served more than a week. These two were Wright Southgate and Giles B. Cook, each of whom held down the billet for ten days. Two or, at most, three days was the limit in the other cases.



On July 4, 1741, the common council passed an ordinance providing that a fine of five shillings be imposed on any male inhabitant who attended divine service without first properly arming himself. Fear of invasion or insurrection prompted this action. The pastor of St. Paul's church delivered his sermons with a pistol lying on the bible stand (fact); and it is said that his habit of carelessly toying with the weapon while the collection was taken up yielded the church an immense revenue (probably a lie.)

Talbot street was opened in 1765, and was the most fashionable residential thoroughfare in the city. It isn't now.

One year after the opening of Talbot street, the Sons of Liberty were organized and protested against the obnoxious Stamp Act. A resolution, embodying the objections and signed by fifty-seven property holders, was adopted. In one respect, this is the most remarkable document in English literature, there not being the name of a Smith, a Jones or a Johnson among the signatures.

General dissatisfaction at the methods employed by Great Britain to collect taxes grew, and, in 1775, the Virginians began to prepare for war. In October of that year, Holt's printing establishment, of Norfolk, was burned by Lord Dunmore, who justified himself by claiming that seditious articles were being printed. As a matter of fact, it is thought that the action of the paper in repeatedly misspelling his lordship's name in the society column had something to do with the case. Also a squib editorial which stated that "The law'd done more for Virginia if Lord Dunmore'd been jailed thirty years previously."



While the colonists were greatly enraged, there are two sides to every question, and the statement that Lord Dunmore, fifteen minutes before the conflagration, was seen to float out of the third story window of Holt's shop, with the keyboard of a linotype around his neck and a bucket of printing ink hanging from one ear, may indicate that he had made an unsuccessful effort to arbitrate with the printers. At any rate, Lord Dunmore, after ridding his system of ten pounds of 6-point type, swore r-r-revenge; and the first local home of typographical errors went up in smoke.

Shortly after this, on December 9, Lord Dunmore again got his—this time at Great Bridge, where his forces met, and were routed by, the Virginians. To judge by the

way the Red Coats streaked it through Norfolk after the engagement, the Virginians must have routed them via fast freight with demurrage charges on all stopovers. One English lieutenant is said to have run aground on Berkley Flats while trying to slow up for the corner of Bank and Queen streets.

Lord Dunmore, who had sought refuge aboard one of the British vessels in the harbor, now developed a severe case of America-phobia. That man got so he couldn't abide the name of Norfolk. Who can blame him? Even to a person of the most equable temperament, there is something irritating about being shot at every time you step out for a breath of fresh air. There is little or no pleasure in having to interrupt your morning constitutional by diving down a hatchway six inches in advance of an allopathic dose of hardware sundries. All of this did the Virginians do unto his



lordship. There were no dainty rules of warfare in those days, and the Virginians were using as ammunition anything that looked hard. A sailor on the English flagship was struck by an alarm clock, the projecting key of which came near winding up his earthly affairs. The poor fellow got up at 6 a. m. every day for the rest of his life and constantly complained of a ringing in his ears.

Thoroughly peeved, Lord Dunmore demanded that the city furnish him with supplies and what was left of the unfortunate local Anglomaniacs. These lovers of dear old Hengland had been having a rugged time of it in Norfolk, which was no place for Willie Waldorf Astors and other expatriates at that writing. The naval officer who bore the demand to shore returned on a shutter and told his lordship that the Virginians had promised to take the matter up at their next meeting.

"At which I trust that I may not be present," he concluded dolefully.

"This is, indeed, ye fierceness," quoth Lord Dunmore, and, on the afternoon of January 1, 1776, began a bombardment of the town.

During the cannonade the city caught fire, and, with the exception of St. Paul's church, was destroyed. Whether the torch was applied by the British or by the revolutionists, who swore that Lord Dunmore should never occupy Norfolk, is a matter of historical dispute. Whoever was responsible made a good job of it.

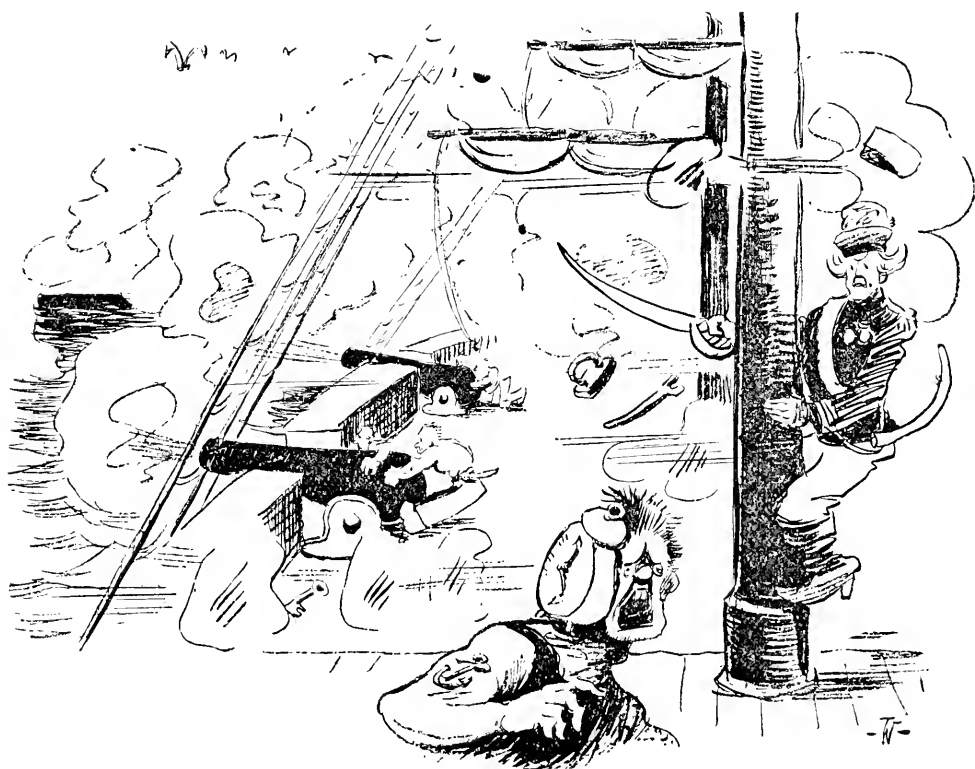
Hundreds of Norfolk citizens were compelled to camp out, and it is only with effort that the historian refrains from saying that their sufferings were in tents. Others, more unfortunate, were forced to live temporarily in Suffolk. Some of them never got over the shock.

Previous to its destruction, Norfolk was the largest and most prosperous settlement in the Virginia colony. It had a population of over 6,000, and its yearly rents were estimated at \$50,000. The loss by fire and cannon shot amounted to more than \$1,500,000—some money in those olden days.

But every cloud has a silver lining. Think of the boost to the souvenir postcard business that was given by the cannon ball imbedded in the side of St. Paul's church!

In 1781, the Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle, a newspaper, was started by a New York firm. One proprietor died and the paper went out of business within six months. Other proprietors said to be still running. The Norfolk Herald, first published in 1787, was more successful, and "got out on time" for many years.

Speaking of newspapers, the first on record in Virginia was published at Williamsburg. This is not intended as a slur on the daily press, but as a statement of fact. The paper was issued weekly and taxed the subscriber about \$1.00 per copy—\$50 a year, to be exact. There were few sporting or other extras sold on the streets. A small advertisement in this journal de luxe cost \$10 for the first insertion and \$7 for each subsequent one. No one advertised for "rooms wanted" at that time; it was cheaper to build a house of your own.



Work on the Dismal Swamp canal was begun in 1787, Patrick Henry, a rather well-known orator, being among the first subscribers to the stock. Dismal Swamp has since proved a gold mine to the Suffolk newspaper correspondents, who are always sending out strange stories of that wierd region. A circus train was wrecked there many years ago; the liberated animals escaped and were lost; and what better opportunity could be asked by the fertile-minded newspaper man? Therefore be not surprised when you read that a giraffe approached the humble home of some Swamp Angel, and, thrusting his head down the chimney, blew out the kitchen fire; or that some lineal descendant of the boxing kangaroo attended a revival meeting, pocketed the collection, and then administered scientific solar plexi to all who opposed him.

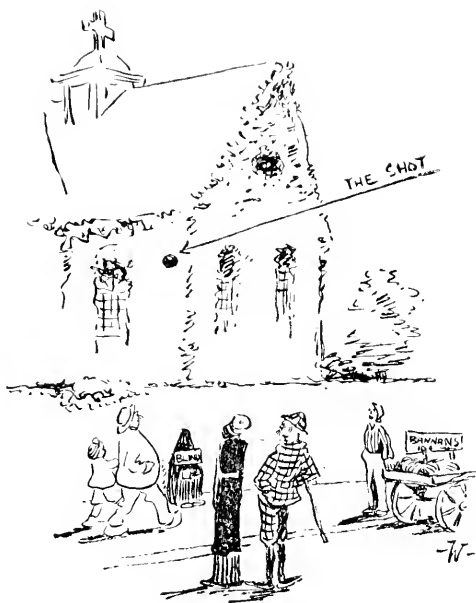
Norfolk in 1800, had a population of 6,926. Among the inhabitants was one George Fritz, who had lost an eye while serving as a drummer during the Revolutionary War. Despite his affliction, Mr. Fritz is said to have played the snare drum both tunelessly and well.

Gosport navy yard was established one year later. Gosport was afterward known as New Town and, saill later, as South Portsmouth. It has always been famous as an athletic center, and many foot races have been run from Lincoln street to the ferry wharf by Norfolk swains whose original intentions had been to call on some of the charming young ladies of South Portsmouth.

One Gosport athlete is reported to have thrown a cobblestone across Southern Branch. This throw was later disqualified, it having been proved that the missile ricochettted in midstream from the bald head of one Thomas Fornetty, master mariner. This decision, so states a veracious historian, "caused ye hot time in ye New Towne thatte nyte."

During the same year, (1801), the Chamber of Commerce was organized, with a charter membership of 45 citizens. One of its first acts was to pass a resolution approving of the fact that the sun rises on the Cape Henry side of the city. This body has passed many other equally important resolutions.





Stepping backward a few years, it may be mentioned that a lottery, authorized by act of assembly, was held in Norfolk county in 1787, for the purpose of raising funds with which to rebuild a church. A total of \$3,500 was secured and a new building, in which the unsuccessful ticket-holders could repent at leisure, was constructed. During this year—remarkable for an extremely high tide and a devastating drought—lightning struck a warehouse containing at

the time two negroes and 300 pounds of gunpowder. A cousin of the departed men used to remark afterward that he had relatives scattered all over Virginia.

There were only ten lawyers in Norfolk in 1806. Let no one hereafter sneer at the “good old times.”

This was a remarkable year for many reasons. The work of renaming and numbering the streets commenced, and has been continued merrily until today. One of the latest methods of numbering a Norfolk house is to divide the age of the oldest occupant by three and multiply the result by the total number of flies swatted in Iceberg county, Greenland, during the thaw of 1457. Reverse the figures and nail over the front door, upside down.

William Wirt, afterward attorney-general for the United States, was here during this busy twelve-month, and complained greatly of the high cost of living. He was charged \$3 for a leg of mutton, and promptly told them to let it stay on the sheep. English standards of money were used, and eggs sold for 2 shillings, 3 pence per dozen. One grocery clerk lost his mind while trying to calculate what 37 eggs would cost if the customer was allowed 8 per cent. off for cash.

Thomas Moore, the English poet, visited Norfolk this same year, and, while here, wrote “The Lake of the Dismal Swamp.”

As no mention is made in the poem of exorbitant charges for eggs or mutton, it is possible that the attorney-general either exaggerated facts or was stung by some unscrupulous dealer.

In 1810 Norfolk had a population of 10,000 and a commerce greater than that of Baltimore. One writer states that it was possible on occasions to walk from Norfolk to Portsmouth on the decks of the ships which crowded the harbor. This statement is given as it stands and without comment, but one cannot help wondering if Doc. Cooke ever had any ancestors living around Norfolk in the olden days. There was a crusade against transparent women's wear at this time, and the more modest ladies wore long dr——pantalets. (See illustration). All you had to do was to get a couple of bolster-covers, sew ruffles on them, and be right in style.

There were no moving picture shows in Norfolk at this time, but the city supported the following places of amusement: A theatre, the Wigwam Gardens, the Vauxhall Gardens and Baths, Rosalain's Bower, Lindsay's Retreat (Why in the world hadn't they named it "Dunmore's Retreat?"). Museum Naturae, and Botanical Gardens. These were well patronized. Besides, there was no fantastic police force to issue orders forbidding bathing in the Elizabeth river except during a total eclipse of the sun. Gone are the happy days when the nude boy descending the staircase (see futurist pictures) could wade out fifteen miles from Mallory Beach at low tide in an effort to find waist-deep water, and come back with his feet so full of oyster shells that he had to walk home on his hands.

An act of assembly in 1811 authorized the corporation to erect street lamps. This was before the days of illuminating gas and Down Home excursions, so no alarm was felt for the safety of the stranger within the gates. This was also before the inhabitants of every village with a street having more than eight lights on it began to speak of said street as a "great white way."

With a most inconvenient (for herself) lack of memory of her follies of 1776, Great Britain had again started trying to break it off in the colonies. English men-o-war recruited wholesale from any American vessel they could overpower, and press-gangs became the rage. No American sailor was safe outside of his home jail. More than one full-rigged ship had to be sculled back to harbor



by the captain and first mate after meeting a British vessel on the high seas. This grew monotonous, and, in 1812, the United States declared war on Great Britain.

Historic Craney Island, where the yellow flag of the Board of Health floats proudly on the breeze, was attacked by the British on June 22, 1813. The British were repulsed; in fact, one of them said afterward that it was the most repulsive repulse he had ever stacked up against. Although the English outnumbered the Virginians nearly ten to one, they were driven back after a loss of one hundred men in killed, wounded and captured. The Virginians lost only one man—a careless sentry who tried to celebrate the occasion by lighting a pipe in the powder magazine. This left the American forces shy one sentry and the rest of their ammunition; but the English, in full retreat, fortunately did not stop long enough to discover this. In the language of the prize ring, they never came back.

There is a quaint, Viking-like flavor about the fact that, during this war, Norfolk harbor was guarded from invasion by an immense chain stretched across the river from Fort Norfolk to the site of the Naval Hospital. Anyone equipped with a modern rifle could have stood outside that chain and made a man in Brambleton pray at the top of his voice. There is something modern, however, about the dispute which arose afterward between the American naval and land forces as to which body of men was entitled to credit for the victory. Each claimed that the other wasn't within long-distance telephone range of the fight, and, but for the kindly intervention of death, they would probably be disputing yet.

People seemed to have the knack of longevity in those days. In 1819, Wonder Booker, a negro, died in Princess Anne county, aged 120 years. His mother, who was 58 years old when he was born, did not survive him. Booker, who celebrated his 118th birthday by getting spiflicated, was dismissed in the police court with a reprimand, the justice telling him that he was old enough to know better. A Princess Anne lady died this year whose age was 99 years, 11 months and 30 days—lacking one day of completing the



span of a century. She left a servant who is said to have reached the age of 120 years.

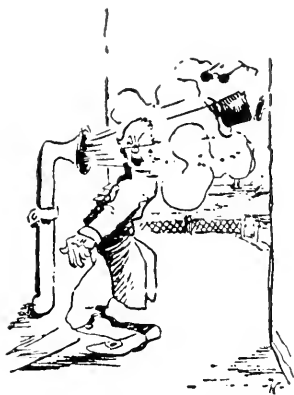
On May 15, 1818, the city council authorized the borrowing of money to construct a stone bridge on Granby street. They failed to authorize anyone to lend the money, however, and the matter remained in statu quo for some time. The spot where the bridge eventually stood is now occupied in the daytime by a traffic policeman.

Lafayette visited Norfolk on October 22, 1824, and was royally entertained. (Where has that term been used before? It seems familiar). The old gentleman left, happy in the knowledge that the city park and Tanner's creek would be named for him in future years. John E. Holt, of whom mention has already been made, was mayor of Norfolk at the time. He always was in those days.

Snow fell in Norfolk on April 7, 1828, for the first time in two years. Open season for silk hats and derbies was declared by all public school students able to throw a straight ball. One estimable citizen incautiously passed the Norfolk Academy at recess hour, and his wife had to use a can-opener later before she could remove his patent-leather bonnet from his head. Wise men mapped out their homeward route so as to avoid all institutions of learning.

Although vessels propelled by steam had previously been seen here, the first steam ferry between Norfolk and Portsmouth was run in 1832. A sad accident marked the initial trip: one of the Portsmouth passengers mistaking the cylinder exhaust valve for a speaking tubs. He was shortly afterward presented with a set of false teeth by the sympathetic officials of the ferry. This was the first specimen of artificial dentistry seen south of Crawford street, and was used for years as a nutmeg grater.

Early Wednesday morning, November 15, 1832, the citizens of

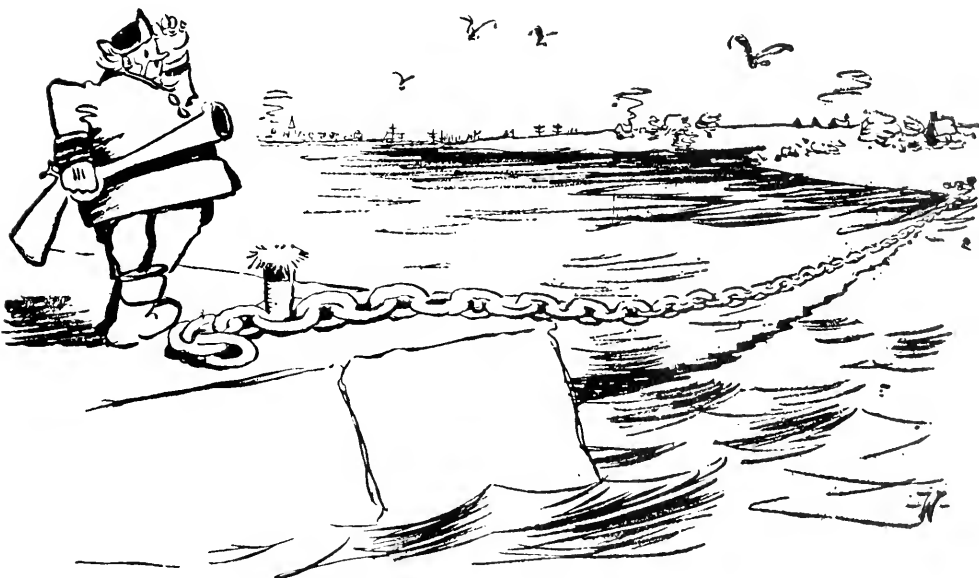


Norfolk were witnesses of an extraordinary meteoric display. For a time, the sky was one tangled maze of shooting stars, and, within ten minutes, the population of Dismal Swamp had increased four thousand per cent. Those who glimpsed the fiery heavens gave one glance upward, dodged a time or so, and then beat it for the land "where the rattlesnake sings in his lair." This last quotation may not be absolutely correct.

Many people thought the world was coming to an end, and it required the services of a hook-and-ladder company to get one councilman out of the top of a tall tree on Brewer street.

August 27, one year later, a severe earthquake shock was experienced. Dismal Swamp again showed signs of great activity.

February, 1835, was some cold. History states that the mercury went down to 25 degrees below zero, but not **this** history. Maybe in those days they used patent summer resort thermometers which wouldn't rise about sixty degrees if you put them in a glass-smelting furnace.





Norfolk celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the granting of its royal charter in 1836. There was a big procession, at the head of which was carried the city mace. This mace was presented to the city by Sir John Randolph in 1736; it was also presented to the city by Robert Dinwiddie, lieutenant-governor of Virginia, in 1753. At least, that's what the histories say. The reader can take his choice. Following the parade, there were aquatic sports and a display of fireworks at night. The day

was passed pleasantly and without accident to anyone except an inebriated gentleman, who tried to light his cigar with the business end of a Roman candle.

Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, afterward emperor of France, visited the city on April 19, 1837, and was the first guest to register at the just completed French's Hotel. This building still stands at the southeast corner of Main and Church streets, and was known at one time as the Hotel Norfolk. To judge by their actions, the last time a real English duke visited there, a modern gang of New York City free-born Americans would have carted the structure away, brick by brick, as precious souvenirs.

Back creek was filled in in 1839, and the reclaimed land used as a park. This property extends from Bank to Cumberland streets, and a portion of it is occupied by the city hall and other municipal buildings. Many a typical old Norfolkian wept at the sight of such progress. One of them wrote a stirring article to the newspaper, stating that this action on the part of the city officials was a gross imposition on a lot of inoffensive soft crabs and peri-



winkles. Praise be, this breed is fading out; but, "booster" stood about as until a few years ago, a much show around Norfolk as a one-legged white man would have had at a negro cake-walk.

The corner-stone of the Norfolk Academy was laid in 1840. Any Norfolk citizen who fails to tell a stranger that this is considered one of the most perfect types of Greek architecture in the United States is either dumb or

else suffering from senile dementia. On a conservative estimate, that remark about the Academy and the Green architecture has been made 36,743,526 times.

Hail stones nearly five inches in diameter fell in Norfolk on December 17, 1840. Hothouse owners went into bankruptcy, and picket fences and hitching posts were driven out of sight in the ground. . One of these hailstones, in a state of perfect preservation, is still used as a paper weight in the office of the city treasurer.

There were nature fakers even in those days. In an article published by a local paper some years ago, it was stated that the drum fish caused untold damage to the oyster crop. This denizen of the deep was said to chew up an oyster, shell and all, as easily as an alligator could masticate a cream puff. As a destroyer of oysters, the drum couldn't be beat. The common or garden crab was said to capture the savage oyster by throwing sand in its eyes. Both of these statements are respectfully referred to T. Roosevelt.

Henry Clay visited Norfolk on April 24, 1844. As he alighted from his carriage, Mr. Clay was cordially saluted by the mayor, city officials and Norfolk Light Artillery Blues. Mr. Clay spoke feelingly on the future of Norfolk, but kindly refrained from mentioning the future of some of its citizens.



An artesian well was sunk on old Market Square this year. Strange to say, the Norfolk County Water Company did not immediately begin to operate a plant on the next corner. They have become more progressive in later years.

A plague of caterpillars hit town the same year. These pests, after eating every tree and table leaf in the city of Norfolk, proceeded to the navy yard, where they destroyed large quantities of shore leaves. One Norfolk gentleman, while descending the steps of the Custom House, stepped on a flock of these insects, and slid up Granby street to Flatiron Square before he could be persuaded to stop.

Norfolk became a full-fledged "city" by an act of legislature on February 13, 1845. Our good friend, "Old Norfolk Citizen," and his ilk opposed this strenuously; but could give no reason for doing so. What cared they for reasons, if they could keep back the city?

"Their's not to reason why;
Their's but to knock or die."

The city was first illuminated by gas in 1849, the plant being located at Walke and Mariner streets. Rosin was used as fuel, but coal was substituted after three destructive fires and a law suit brought on by the smoke nuisance. The gas plant was moved to its present location in 1853. This is still known as the scenter of the town.

With 1850, this history of Norfolk closes. There were a number of important events during that year. The present city hall was completed, with a cistern that could hold 45,000 gallons of water, if necessary, and a cupola from the dizzy heights of which a keen observer can easily see the Monticello Hotel and the Masonic



Temple. The Avon Theatre was burned and there was a frost in April which remained unparalleled until some of the Northern papers described the opening of the Jamestown Exposition. A tornado frolicked through Norfolk county in August, and, amid other damage, blew an elderly gentleman's whiskers so deeply into a pine fence that it was necessary to sever the beard with a saw before he could be released. Other owners of whiskers hummed like aeolian harps until they secured shelter from the swirling breeze.

Norfolk, at this time, had a population of 14,320. Since then, despite the setbacks of the yellow fever, the Civil War, and the machinations of the "Old Norfolk Citizen" before mentioned, the city has grown steadily, and now has the honor of having public servants who receive more money than the highest officials of the United States Government. Granby street, once the promenade of Colonial gentlemen and dames, now teems with busy life, and will teem with still busier death if the police don't pay less attention to the Elizabeth river bathing facilities and put the brakes on some of the automobile enthusiasts who are turning that thoroughfare into a race course.

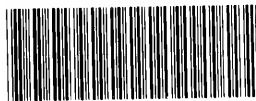
So ends this tale. Norfolk is an unusually interesting town from a historic point of view, and, besides this valuable document, there are other histories of the quaint old place in the bygone centuries that will repay re-reading.

But, by all means, read this one first.



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